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# ***Theatrum Philosophicum* : Thinking Literature and Politics with Walter Benjamin.**

**By Oscar Guardiola-Rivera**

## **1. *Theatrum Philosophicum*: Reintroducing the Play of Chance.**

Before the apotheosis of war happened in the lands of our childhood, experience was passed down through the generations in the form of tales, images and stories. These also conveyed a sense of the inter-temporality of justice, of intergenerational justice and the secret pact made between our ancestors and the younger generations, providing the latter with the power to survive the most violent onslaughts and through play, role-play and tech-tools crack the world open.

After the apotheosis of war, however, the fragile human bodies that emerged out of death from above and the killing fields where coffins with no remains pile up as an artwork of the future, seemed invisible and mute. They may want to be seen, but have been spirited away; they may speak, but nobody wants to listen. Like the ghost in Hamlet, we've been rendered unable to commune with and communicate the "forcefield of destructive torrents and explosions" to those who should listen.<sup>1</sup>

Instead, all we get is the repetitive news cycle and the poor jargon of Twitter. These feed no one; being "poor in noteworthy stories", they can neither catalyze the movement found in the experience of a land in anguish, nor de-form the given world beyond imagination the way dreams and fantasy play do. Instead, they feed obedience by mythologizing history and social forces into fate as well as the illusion of the juridical-psychic unity of individuals: for example,

the imagery of self-propelling markets and the declarative language of states of emergency and crisis. And yet, precisely because of this the apparently redundant forms of literature, imagery and textuality –play- become full of pathos, highly charged with electric energy, and their seeming obsolescence or untimeliness, becomes the condition of their critical power.<sup>2</sup>

Walter Benjamin, never given to the trappings of nostalgia wishing to revive the traditions of the past, saw in this light the lyric poetry of Baudelaire, the detective-fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, and the utopian fantasies of Fourier, among others. He wasn't the only one to connect the untimeliness of these literary forms with the possibility of communicating experience in spite of the experience of catastrophe and the catastrophe of experience in the wake of war, capitalism and spectacle. But he was unique in emphasizing the power of the play of words and images to lure and magnetize affections speculatively, cracking not just the world but also time open.<sup>3</sup>

Children and actors invest radically in the sort of performances that take place in play, insofar as what they get out of their living experiences in their respective milieus and practices isn't related to having some certainty about winning or losing. Their radical investment in events accelerating or slowing down time generates dimensions and milieus, intensifying life in what seems inert or devitalizing animated beings and fostering in them a regression towards instinct, and therefore traveling back and forth between logical and actual possibility.

In general terms, we call "rituals" the kinds of empirical events that have the status of both actualizing a possibility and in doing so acting in a way that moves from maintaining and preserving a fragile promise to its actualization in

the future. They involve dramatizations (often, of violence) that produce a kind of textuality, which the audience participates in and experiences as a sticky interface between actual performance and poetic inscription, scene or staging, thereby recasting from then onwards social or cosmological situations experienced before as uncertain or traumatic.

Ritual has its most powerful effect by bringing into effect a change of state in its prime actors “as well as in the cosmology that is its frame” by realizing as new a space and time presumed as its pre-condition “through a sequence of actions in which effects create causes or conditions of possibility that take shape only in retrospect”, but are carried into the present and the future. In general, philosophers and anthropologists call the creative force of text, language and of speech acts uttered in rituals “performative”. After J. L. Austin’s analysis of the performative and Jacques Derrida’s, Drucilla Cornell’s and Judith Butler’s work on performativity and the symbolic, also in the wake of theories of ritual as communication in archeology and anthropology with implications on personhood and the creation of options and leverages, it would be best to speak, as I do, of the “retro-futuristic performative” as central to a renewed understanding of the play of promises and their failure or actualization.<sup>4</sup>

Such philosophical understanding of play, which I’ve termed here textuality or in a wider sense philosophical theatre, finds its conceptual persona in “the sentry of dreams”. Miguel Abensour borrows him from Victor Hugo’s *L’Homme qui rit* apropos of Benjamin. Benjamin’s philosophical heteronym is a character named Ursus, who plays the role of the paradigmatic beggar philosopher, the discomforter, with regard to his pupil Gwynplaine whose utopian fantasies of social justice the master knows will be seen as dangerous by

the rulers. "A philosopher is a spy or a detective, and Ursus, sentry of dreams, kept a close eye on his pupil". Making Abensour's words ours, "Walter Benjamin is a sentry of dreams", a philosopher-detective searching for what can be salvaged from the interrupted collective dreams of the last two centuries, all the while keeping a close eye on the way dreams and fantasies fascinate us (fascination of abomination, after Conrad). To awake ourselves from what had been the existence of our parents, fascination of abomination, we need to reintroduce a sense of absolute risk and the play of chance in existence and social life.<sup>5</sup>

One could say about play what Benjamin says about the perennial player, the gambler: "Life has only one real charm –the charm of gambling. But what if we do not care whether we win or lose?"<sup>6</sup> Quoting Baudelaire in this text, Benjamin would know for he was a gambler himself. The gambler, the Cynic beggar philosopher, slaves and monsters, the ragpicker, the refusing clerk, the Amazon, the prostitute, the man of the crowd, the detective, the cleaner; all of them are figures of poverty and poor images themselves; what if they gathered and acted politically without care for wins or losses? This line of questioning ties in with Baudelaire's interest in E. A. Poe's "analysis of the eccentrics and the pariahs of this world", a phrase that according to Benjamin corresponds also to the self-portrait introduced by Auguste Blanqui in his *L'Eternité par les astres*: the image of the discomforter, she/he/it who interrupts the finitude of given time, the metrics of the horizontal and the vertical (also the vertical gaze of apotheosis and violence) in the direction of the infinite, the speculative and the absolute – risking his life in the fire this time, in now-time, danger time.

Crucially, the point of invoking these images of poverty has nothing to do with the virtue and morality of gamblers and the poor, or their supposed lack thereof. Rather, it concerns both the kind of risk involved in their action and the effervescent quality of the time of risk and action. This includes the capacity of images, utterances and performances to produce a dramatic intensification of the affects they lure as well as their insistence on another course (of history, of possibility) at the heart of the event.

To be more precise, it concerns the coproductive and mutually catalytic relation between security-certainty and risk-uncertainty, or the sense in which speculative images and propositions both require and retro-futuristically produce a milieu that gives them their consistency and justification: whereas some particular certainty could be produced by lifelong ritual performance and practice (for instance, the methodical practice of profit-making) in this case uncertainty would remain a generic existential condition that couldn't be resolved in this life, despite one's ethical efforts. Such a life would then constitute a continuing effort "to reset the relation between certainty and uncertainty, with profit-making in business as a constant effort and salvational uncertainty as background reality" and imaginary framework given by the civic "theological model" (as Max Weber taught us).<sup>7</sup>

Something else is required: the co-staging of certainty and uncertainty that recasts the latter and changes the perspective of participants, who wake up to the possibility of another course of history and its actualization, come what may. The question of another course of action, for either event or history, isn't postponed or deferred to the space of utopia but becomes an urgent one posited every time in each act as a lightning-like image that makes up the battle at all

levels of existence, without certainty as to victory or defeat. This image, flashing forth in the Now (neither the Old nor the New) of performativity, running through the hesitations attached to each act as it plays out, is what must be seized in order to both hold on to and let go of the world of dreams of Yesteryear or the bliss of the Everafter. The operation of salvage that is effected in this way, and only in this way, can ever be accomplished solely "for the sake of what in the next moment will be irretrievably lost", without hope of salvation, without reservation or hope of restoration and return, Benjamin says. Isn't this technology of awakening what Benjamin terms, precisely, the dialectical image?<sup>8</sup>

In other words, two kinds of technologies of anticipation can be distinguished in our understanding of play, image recognizability, and the time of risk and action. First, ritual and practice appear as part of a nearly universal apparatus for hedging, producing routine and regularity (standards, norms, metrics) as well as the kind of predictability associated with the mythical notion of eternal return. As is the case in the methodical ritual practice of profit-making, which Weber theorized as "the spirit" of capitalism and writers from the Jesuit jurist-theologians of early modernity to Sade and Fourier in the nineteenth century explored and experimented with in their texts, technologies of hedging are also subjugating of time and nature, absorbing all that is unexpected or unfamiliar about the latter within grasped regularities elevated to the condition of law-like repetitive patterns.

Second, once pushed to the background, uncertainty returns as the reality to be dealt with via rituals of redemption that would recover a sense of the harmonious play between technology and nature in the projection of a Golden Age, either as a past in need of restoration or the bliss of the ever after. If the first

technology produces the One (in contrast to nature, thus as a super-natural being that demands full investment from persons), the second technology aims to produce the Many or the Crowd in sync or “harmony” with nature; that is, as a connected-natural being that demands little investment from the collective by engaging in repeated experimentation via three operations--isolation, articulation (the obligation of speaking or confessing, passing through language) and ordering or classification (producing sequences that aren't of the order of syntax but that of metrics)- thereby delivering the Individual, the man in the crowd, out of play.

Benjamin alluded to these two technologies early on, in a fundamental text from 1936: note I of the French version of *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, which he translated together with Pierre Klossowski. The first technology originates in social ritual, he says, “the first technology excluded the autonomous experience of the individual. Every magical experience was collective” and involved full investment from persons, up to sacrifice. And while the first comprises a project of subjugation and colonization of nature, “the origin of the second technology is to be found in the moment when, guided by an unconscious scheme, man learns for the first time to distance himself from nature. In other words, the second technology is born in play”, engendering a new relationship to nature, aiming to find “a harmony between nature and humanity”.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, modernity isn't so much a progression from the first “hedging” ritual-technologies to the second “play” individual-making metric-technologies, but the theatre of a battle between the two. Liberal and social-democrat reformists take their cue from the subjugation of nature that informs



their belief in progress, in an “infinite perfectibility -an infinite ethical task-“ that, Benjamin declares, is but the other side of “the representation of the eternal return.” Proper to the first technology and its concept of subjugated nature, these two illusions -progress and repetition- are complementary. “They are the indissoluble antinomies in the face of which the dialectical conception of history must be developed.”<sup>10</sup> This is modernity as dream and phantasmagoria, as our centuries prove to be the time of repetitions in which the Old wins out through the very experience of the New. Thus, the problem with the New is that it turns out to be the very negation of movement: it “engenders the return of myth which, wearing the mask of the New, reveals itself to be the terror and catastrophe of repetition”, as Abensour explains apropos of Benjamin’s contrasting invocation of Baudelaire, Fourier and Blanqui (also Sade) as founders of textuality.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, reintroducing the play of chance in existence and social life isn’t a matter of novelty, let alone fashion or the certainty of return (neither as restoration of the past nor as profit, secured through the deferral of a different, unexpected future), but to unleash the lightning-like power of ritual to articulate events differently and to lure, capture, and recast the real concerns (hatred and struggle, or “combinatory play”, as in Fourier’s utopia) within a machinery of the passions. This conception of the act and the justifications for action envisages a move beyond morality -destructive of the history of ethics, or moral history. Rather than appealing to the virtue of the poor, for instance, the point is to lure and intensify the hesitation and concern in their action, the worry felt at that moment, the forks in the road that come to be in this action or lack thereof.

It can be said of all actions and justifications, in this respect, that they’re mixtures of possibilities and actualities. If so, speculative performances and

propositions aren't choices or judgments, and they don't make decisions for the world; rather, they recast uncertain conditionals and events differently, so that for the possibility of another course of history to acquire consistency and actuality it must lure and intensify the real worries that predict them at least in part (one could speak of a "prophetic gaze" in this precise sense). Such affects of hatred and combat develop in the memories of the participants, in texts and literary or historical-philosophical works and images or ritual refusals as they both depict and enact the combat's explosive unfolding. An "art of war", one might call it, but not so much "a new art of war" as a lightning-like art of war that emerges suddenly in the Now and, exploding time from within, as a spark or a bomb, situates or institutes and constitutes a milieu of consistency – a new dimension.

Ultimately, the relevance of a speculative (dialectical) image or proposition has to do with making sense and the constitution of our actual and near-future world as a world-in-the-making: what it inherits as a result of its secret pact with the past, and the power of the possibilities that continue to have a latent or weak presence, its futures and tendencies, which raise the question of inter-temporal justice.

## 2. On the Uses of Force: Inter-temporal Justice and the Maximal Intensification of Experience.

Rather than to conceive of justification in the normal sense of judgment (the judgment of God, or the command/demand of love and obedience by a super-human being -a King or President, a result of first technology) it would be better to speak of the maximal intensification of our lived experience (giving

value to all existence, the importance assumed by ways of seeing and feeling that are specific play combinations of each existent, affirmative of what matters here and now and thus constitutive of nature itself).

And instead of situating the aims of our actions in the space of utopia, it would be better to situate or recast utopia in the time-dimensionality of play cleared by second technology, which renews childhood and lets go of nature. It may be best to speak of uchronies rather than utopias, and of a technology that “appears as the spark” or the bomb that “ignites the powder of nature” instead of absorbing it, as Benjamin says.<sup>12</sup>

Also, the power of ritual shouldn’t be understood here reductively, as mere hedging against danger through metaphorical standardization, but rather, as opening up an interval, a time-gap between the present and the future, in which the effervescence of collective retro-futuristic performance produces, forcefully and with electricity (as Durkheim taught us) a sort of conviction that is performative (as J. L. Austin and Judith Butler taught us) but also constitutive and metaphorically transformative of the force of all social institutions and conventions in ordinary social life.

We’re speaking of action as a ritualized encounter that produces its own conditions of possibility. The collective effervescence of the interval, which can be technologically mediated, is the moment when certainty is produced out of uncertainty because social uncertainty is recast in the ritual process by the very participation of all actors and players who accept to take part in and collaborate in the ritual process. Ritual actors and brothers/sisters-in-arms are restless and compulsive collectors and archivists. They appropriate through incorporation (rather than plunder and property), rescuing the tone of inaudible voices and the

forensic traits of disappeared bodies issued forth from images, analogous to films that reappropriate “found” poor images turning them into engrams, frames and montages of attractions. This operational procedure, bringing forth the interval, is a matter survival. It’s neither love (as both Critchley and Žižek believe, oblivious to its entanglement with myth) nor fascination (of abomination). Action is extemporaneous, uchronistic or unexpected (rather than predictable or anachronistic) invention. The best example here is interlocation with ghosts and ancestors, in the fashion of *Hamlet’s* Marcellus.<sup>13</sup>

This means the true risk of an action lies not in the space of standards and probabilistic calculation but is the risk of arriving at an agreement in any sort of contingent claim in the absence of any reliable (stochastic, probabilistic, or rational-managerial) model of prior instances. This is absolute risk, or as I prefer “gratuitous” risk, the kind of which is involved in action taken irrespective of whether one cares for safety or knows beforehand with any certainty whether the outcome would be a win or lose. In true (Hegelian) speculative mood this means radically investing all, one’s life in taking action without reservation.

What looms in the background of this most important of Benjamin’s thoughts is a certain conception of time as the unquantifiable unknown -the open future; and following from that, a concept of historical change as the result of contingent claims advanced by the various ghostly figures of the poor when they fall on the side of objects without reservation, and having fallen, they and their seemingly dead objects speak to the living, coming from the depths, in a voice that the latter cannot recognize (for instance, as filmed subjects or radio-theatrical events) and in doing so question the foreclosure of the future.

The techno-human principle derived from Benjamin's conception of time and transformative action can be distilled into one word: interruption. The task isn't only to interpret history but to dive into and invest in it, in its radical transformation, from the perspective of the effervescent moments that interrupt the continuity of time foreclosed. In such moments of dramatic experimentation, the action transmutes "a technical operation into a human event". Benjamin speaks in this sense of a "laboratory of the dramatic".<sup>14</sup>

The Paulinian concept of time as *kairós*, which the Jewish founder of Christianity uses at least eight times in his *Letter to the Romans* to refer to "now-time", also lurks behind these photo-electric reflections on time, risk and action.<sup>15</sup> Let's also consider in this context the messianic notion of the return of the ghostly and the dead (advent, *parousía*), which immediately evokes images of final judgment and the interruption of history from the perspective of the poor and the fallen as both denunciation and utopia: the times and things to come. In this context the notion of the "to come" acquires the meaning and sense of physical presentation, of bringing spirits (such as the disembodied voices of the fallen of history coming from radio and cinema, poor and lost images to be found in the archive of history, in the dream-like slumber of capitalist culture) back to their bodies. The latter, says Benjamin, is the power of (experimental) theatre in alliance with radio and cinema: to immobilize the image in motion, the course of the action, obliging spectators to take position in relation to the process and actors in relation to their role, interrupting the flow of the normal and the legal. "The exposition of a physical presence", as Benjamin observes. Now the point moves away from the civic-theological closer to the theatrical and to combat, the ritual and the political: to construct the people and their cause in the image of

absolute risk and performative force, radical investment, and time-creating action as per Baudelaire's dramatic play of rags and tatters: in the latter, having taken a step into the abyss, there's no going back.<sup>16</sup>

The point resonates also with Adorno's idea that the only act of thinking likely to bear cognitive fruit is one that takes place in free fall, *a fonds perdu*, without reservation.<sup>17</sup> "The vertigo which this causes is an *index veri*; the shock of inclusiveness", or, the open.<sup>18</sup> Adorno's take on (living, intellectual) experience in this passage posits that a concept that is to pass into a moral-political image of freedom will throw itself to the objects, onto the side of all that has been turned into a thing, "embracing a world of forces and matter, which lacks any original stability and sparks the sudden shock of the open: a freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing and always already unknown. Falling means ruin and demise as well as love and abandon, passion and surrender, decline and catastrophe", corruption or destruction as well as liberation or a transformative condition –from things into people and vice versa.<sup>19</sup>

Liberation-destruction takes place in the open and as the opening of what I've called the interval, as the stage for metaphorical transformation and philosophical theatre. It doesn't necessarily entail ultimate (social) death or utter power over life and death just as falling does not entail falling apart. It can also mean that arbitrary power (the kind that's often identified with all-powerful rulers who make themselves the equivalent of gods through the use of violence that Benjamin calls "mythic") can be and has been limited through the (performative) creation of institutions that not only head off the danger of utter violence but uses its force to bind (as the giver and receiver are bound by a gift), thereby bringing into effect a change of state in the prime actors of the

instituting performance as well as in the cosmology that's its frame. Thus, also, bringing about a world presumed as the precondition of both institutions and performances through the sequence of actions in which effects create causes or conditions of possibility that take shape only retroactively. Such use of force, constitutive of a people, of their actions beyond any justification through God's judgment or command, as "pure" means opposed to ends-oriented morality, taking on full responsibility as ourselves or as members of a community (as individuals or individuals), anthropologists call "sacred" and Benjamin terms "divine".<sup>20</sup>

This retro-creativity has been identified primarily as a linguistic effect, but there's no reason why it cannot be extended to the concrete effects of the political imagination, the combination between the utopian and protest or critique, the prophetic vision and voice. The force that binds in any institutionalizing ritual process reveals a logic of reciprocity and alterity, gift and counter-gift that may be said to precede any actual exchange. The interval emerges in between gift and counter-gift, denunciation and the time to come, the historical and ahistorical strata within utopia considered as a form of the collective dream.

Put otherwise, objects and gifts in the ritual process don't create ties between monadic individuals but between parts thereof, violent and volatile. If my ritual gesture of reciprocity and alterity (an extended hand, which both indexes a contingent claim and hands it over) meets no receiving gesture (a receiving hand), war follows.<sup>21</sup> Thus, violence operates here in a dual register: first, for simplification, drawing lines where otherwise one might see only complex networks of human relations, bringing asymmetries in to the open, and

then, second, against simplification, in the sense that if it's true that the quality of sovereign power is to define its subjects as a single people then, prior to any war between different peoples, is the war between the people subjected and the sovereign-ruler that subjects them. Isn't this in fact what Marx called living labor?<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The Gratuity of Risk: On the Relation Between Armed Struggle and Finance.

In other words, the model of action invoked here after Benjamin is the gratuity of risk. This means, on the one side, breaking up with the tendency to manipulate nature or reality and ultimately subject it to domination, control and subsumption. Such act of rupture must take place first in the hearts of militants and their political desire. Put otherwise, the correct answer to the question raised by critical philosophy at least since Kant "what can we know, hope or believe and do?", which arguably boil down to the practical question of belief and action, is "nothing". However, it's because of that inconstancy of will or lack of ultimate ground that we act, taking real risks. This can be understood as an existential demand to live our lives in the most meaningful sense of the term "option", rather than simply manage it. In this respect, liberation and freedom are the opposite of a well-calculated hedged financial operation; perhaps is better to say that the meaning of liberation/freedom comes closer to that of an expanded understanding of leverage.

On the other side, this involves a kind of realism about the time dimension: if there's nothing we can know, hope or believe, no ultimate ground, ends-oriented morality or end-of-history projected into the future or scripture as



the bliss of the ever after, then the force and legitimacy of an action emerges radically, here and now, from the denunciation of present and concrete situations. This is what in their reflections on the concreteness of the dream of justice Latin American Liberation philosophers call “propheticism”, different from but related to “utopia”.<sup>23</sup> They refer, simply, to enacting vision and spirit – which renews all things- as opposed to the legalizing of ritual performance as habit, and to protest as well as forward-looking project in opposition to the countable verification of results and the calculation of inputs and outputs.

In this respect, Liberation thinkers are the true successors of Benjamin, and Latin America the place and time where his intuitions become realizable. To make or change history is to create here and now those possible times and things to come. If and when it comes (*advent*, the arrival of “the man of lawlessness” or the antinomian attitude, living corporality, a presence revealed in action) it will arrive in history not as the result of will or a managed project, but in surprising and contradictory ways. This is to say that the advent-event may be considered imminent, and yet, the timing is uncertain since it’s unknown. If such is the case, then historical ruptures are violent and “catastrophic”, i. e. analytically unpredictable yet utopian.

The alternative or “new world will be a landscape”, or a dreamscape, and “not paradise. The only freedom of action for humans, the only possibility to stop being the spectator of one’s own life is to engage in actions of resistance and creation that correspond to the situation”. This is so because, if the advent of historical ruptures isn’t dependent on mere will, the key to unleash transformative action is “to discern what is concretely realizable among logically possible things” or options, or “to recognize what is ‘compossible’ in relation to

the situation". Certain things are impossible (e.g.. a square circle) but other things, such as perpetual peace or that the day will come when wealth could be equally repartitioned among us all, aren't. They may not be realizable in given time for this or that reason, and neither our strongest will nor our best wishes and intentions would suffice to realize them. Only an external element, often a technological limitation or its sublation, might change categorically the state of the situation, intensifying it and magnetizing our affections . An example would be the way in which the fabrication and availability of effective contraceptives impacted upon feminist demands for liberation that were always possible but not historically sufficient. What was both desirable and possible became also concretely compossible and realizable. This has nothing to do with "objective conditions", but rather with the fact that in their absence militants can always engage in destructive-resistant action and create techniques of liberation that are just and necessary, which in time can work as part of the effective architecture of the free landscape that would emerge, arrive, at an illuminating point in time and space (a landscape's address, as John Berger would say).<sup>24</sup>

What arrives? In Benjamin's words, "the image of an earth in which every place has become an inn. The double meaning of the word *Wirtschaft* blossoms here: all places are worked by human hands, made useful and beautiful thereby; all, however, stand like a roadside inn, open to all. An earth that was cultivated according to such an image would cease to be part of 'a world where action is never the sister of dream'. On that earth the act would be kin to the dream". On the other hand, we aim to grasp the importance of "the forms that reveal the collective dream" of our times.<sup>25</sup>

We can better appreciate the originality of such an approach, pioneered by Benjamin and others in the periphery of the Surrealist movement such as Aimé Césaire, in that they are “on guard against the seduction of the myths and their inexorable drift toward nothingness”, being just as careful to neglect neither the forms of the dream nor the fetish-forms that populate our pathetic digital and audiovisual late-capitalist dreamscapes, “those oneiric visions of the collective through which the drift toward death can be overcome”. In other words, normative and politically speaking, the invitation is to renew our focus on prophecy and denunciation, or protest, and utopia<sup>26</sup>.

As Walter Benjamin suggested in a manner that connects his conceptualizations and the admiration he felt for the methods and concepts of art historian Aby Warburg, quoted above, this is the way to get to the everyday material traces of our collective memory “guided by the objects themselves”, in contrast with the tendency of museum and gallery exhibitions “to show culture in lavish Sunday dress, only rarely in its poor everyday clothes”.<sup>27</sup> The conceptual figure of such method, combining without ever fusing together the opposites of a sudden or overpowering force and a stable pattern that can be replicated or iterated in time, is the poor ragpicker, the beggar philosopher and the sampler. He’s neither the highbrow aesthete in search for the sublime nor the wealthy and assiduous visitor of private galleries, art fairs and biennials, but *le chiffonier* who appears in Baudelaire’s poetry as well as in Aimé Césaire’s unclassifiable writings.

To critique the tendency to show culture “in lavish dress” is of paramount practical as well as theoretical importance, especially in our societies of predominant audiovisual production and digital economies of valorization,

spatial-temporal displacement and standardization. According to Benjamin the tendency is characteristic of mainstream culture, and of a certain relation to nature or object-relation. For Benjamin, this mode of object-relation is the “technological exploitation of nature by man”, an idea, moreover, “that became widespread in the following period”, our period.<sup>28</sup>

Arguably, Benjamin introduces this concept of exploitation prompted by Theodor W. Adorno’s criticism of his idea of a “machinery made of men” whose institutional “highly complicated organization” would facilitate a “meshing of the passions”, posited in relation to Fourier’s utopian vision of socio-economic reproductive and productive urban organization (Fourier’s Phalanstery), which Benjamin saw as analogous to the modern “city of arcades”. As is known, Adorno thought the analogy between Fourier’s Phalanstery and the city of arcades, Paris, wasn’t “really clear”.<sup>29</sup>

Further, it can be argued that Benjamin not only introduced and retooled a notion of nature exploited by man’s technology in response to Adorno’s criticism, but also developed a related but different notion of nature and technology, as shown above in relation to second technology, in which “technology appears as the spark that ignites the powder of nature”.<sup>30</sup> This was based on Marx’s seemingly odd defense of Fourier’s utopian “colossal conception of man” as somewhat akin to Hegel’s (and Marx’s own) unmasking of the average petty-bourgeois subject behind the grand rhetoric of Man’s rights.

Put otherwise, Benjamin’s argument is that the notion of nature that corresponds to the mode of object-relation termed by Adorno “identity thinking”, entailing the objects’ subsumption as tokens absorbed by fundamentally invariant “types”, is absent from Fourier’s socialist utopia. This is

because, according to Benjamin, in Fourier technology and nature interact explosively –technology being the spark to nature’s powder- which means that a second and alternative mode of object-relation can be posited: one in which nature’s forces or impulses aren’t reduced to invariant “types” or standards but rather act as “bombs”, in the analogy of the shamanic vision-quest, the free play of the passions, and the band of brothers and sisters in struggle – the ancient or indigenous and ritualistic formulas of intensified physical and psychic expression evoked above in relation to Aby Warburg’s and Césaire’s (Baudelaireian) genealogy of art and artifices, as well as Ernesto Guevara’s gratuity of risk.

The incorporation-ingestion of Benjamin’s thought that has occupied a great deal of this paper, is possible on the basis of a joint reading of some of the texts he composed between 1930 and 1939 on the separation of objects from instituting rituals (that functioned as “useless” *simulacra* in theatrical and theological rites) and the “revolutionary negation” of the law (the latter including his early 1920 review fragment on the right to use force); specifically, a negation of the fundamental aspect of the law regulating human groups’ exchange of objects and bodies’ reproduction. In the “Paris Diary”, Benjamin referred to “the ancient law of Genesis” in order to highlight this normative aspect as the point cutting across the literary work of Baudelaire and Sade (also Fourier).<sup>31</sup>

The point is both cosmological and political. Speaking in cosmological terms, the fabrication of objects was first inspired by the gods: according to the Judeo-Christian cosmology, for instance, while in paradise Eve and Adam had a direct relationship to the objects of nature in the garden. Adam and Eve would

acknowledge the objects present to him by naming them. The performative force of this utterance would make the objects of use themselves inseparable from the creative, constitutive or instituting act. With the Fall that relationship changed so that “knowledge of good and evil abandons name; it is ... the uncreated imitation of the creative word”, as Benjamin says.<sup>32</sup> Put otherwise, tools, utensils and other objects of use lose their “aura” as they can be distinguished from “useless” objects or simulacra. If before the latter were full of creative performative force, phantasm or spirit, with the advent of technologies of (capitalist) reproduction these supposedly “useless” objects survive only by being reduced to quantifiable commodities in the so-called art market, thus in fact becoming as reproducible and exchangeable as the seemingly distinct tools and utensils.

If this is the case, then art objects and objects of use, or fabricated objects, aren’t so distinct from each other insofar as they both incarnate an impulse or force directed towards creation and procreation – what can be called the procreative instinct of the species and the voluptuous passion or affection that precedes the act of creation taking place in sex, work or ritual- which is “suspended” under the industrial regime and diverted elsewhere, into the simulated imitations that populate our world of perverse consumerist phantasmagoria, as Benjamin would say.

This is precisely what makes us all fetishists under the normativity of the industrial regime. On the one hand there’s idolatry, which might in fact predate the industrial regime of production as the form of a broader metaphysics of inter-subjective and inter-temporal being. The latter should be understood as a modality of the constraint of the One over the Many, and conversely, of the Many (as unified, native or original, and residually sovereign-divine people)

recognizing, confining, limiting and constraining in struggle the (seemingly super-human, or divine-mythical) power of the One.

This also means that cosmo-political relations may very well extend beyond subject-object relations of production typically defined along Cartesian or Kantian lines - what the latter called “original acquisition”, or the use of force as conquest, with a heroic individual imposing form upon inert matter and absorbing it within his own plan. If so, it may be better to speak of intersubjective and inter-temporal relations between people, their ancestors and the rest of the nonhuman cosmos, none of which are inert. In that case, as contemporary anthropologists would say on the basis of widespread ethnographic evidence, our average notion of “production” fails to adequately describe human praxis in a wider cosmos: for instance, women gardeners don’t produce the plants they cultivate, they have a personal relation with them, name them and speak to them so as to nurture them and help them grow and survive just as Eve and Adam would’ve done in the garden of Eden according to Benjamin’s reading of Genesis cosmology. Similarly, it can be said that people don’t create the crops but receive them from ancestral sources.<sup>33</sup>

Certain obsessive constraints follow from recognizing such relation, which we could term “law”, in the sense of universal negative rules that predicate positive structures and at the same time uphold them. These pertain to a counter-force, a use of force counter to the mythical violence (conquest, original acquisition) that appeals to God’s commands in establishing sovereignty and the sovereign’s law. As we’ve seen, Benjamin speaks in this regard of “law-destroying” or göttliche *Gewalt*, a force that could also be termed god-destroying if not because those opposing the absolute violence and legality of the sovereign

(kingship) do so as prophets (rather than chiefs) “from the desire to find a ‘law without evil’ and under death; it is in this sense that Christ (the Redeemer) was a king”. Here is the prophetic embryo of what one could call the utopian element of the state. Violence, or more precisely combat or struggle, plays a crucial role here. Ditto, its peculiarity is to simplify, draw lines and classify (civility from barbarism, as first technology) where otherwise one might see only complexity; but at the same time, conversely, one’s ability to constitute oneself as a single people emerges between the possibility and actualization of a relationship of combat between the people and the sovereign.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. In Defense of Armed Struggle.

In their ethnographic fieldwork on the absolute violence and other acts of transgression performed by kings and chieftains, acting like gods or like God and getting away with it, contemporary anthropologists have in fact recognized the dilemma echoed in the modern law-state that Benjamin captured in his distinction between “law-making” and “law-maintaining” (as well as “law-destroying”) violence. “Really it is exactly the same paradox, cast in the new language that is necessary once the power of kings (‘sovereignty’) had been transferred, at least in principle, to an entity referred to as ‘the people’ -even though the exact way in which ‘the people’ were to exercise sovereignty was never clear”, writes David Graeber. “No constitutional order can constitute itself ... The legitimacy of any legal order therefore ultimately rests on illegal acts - usually, acts of illegal violence”, he concludes. Indeed, as Graeber observes, the writers of the U.S. Constitution were guilty of treason in accordance to the legal regime under which they were born. Further, whatever solution we were to



embrace (leftist periodical peoples' revolutions, or rightist states of emergency or exception) the paradox remains.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, it seems to me this is the profound challenge Benjamin left us with when he urged us to introduce, enact and institute "a real state of emergency". On the one hand, this means that as we now know full well, successful thugs and businessmen can indeed become sovereigns, even create new laws and morals, and of course genuine sovereignty does always carry the potential for absolute violence. But on the other, people have always known that kings need to be tamed -kings and chiefs of state can not only become scapegoats, they can also be dramatically set against warriors, enemies, prophets rising their voices in the desert against kings or dragging societies towards self-dissolution in war and so on. The chief can be seen as a kind of enemy and the prophet as a kind of warrior and so forth and back again in a cycle.<sup>36</sup>

But central to such theatrical, performative, combat-like dynamic (precisely because it is eccentric) is the political ally, the stranger or the immigrant, neither local nor enemy. Combat, the peoples' war, or "armed" struggle thus understood has never been about two positions and their strategic calculus, and never about simple binaries: everything turns around the political ally, this half-local group or volatile yet indispensable groups, which form a guerrilla band of uncertainty around each local group recasting such uncertainty into certainty, turning internal indivision/individuality into external fragmentation and potential affinity, thereby impeding both collective fusion under the One and the dispersal of the Many in generalized warfare. It's in this respect that it makes sense to speak of perpetual peace, pace Kant, as the never-ending search for political allies.

This is also the truth of peacemaking: against Girard, the way out of violence isn't scapegoating but alliance, as in the example given by Achilles and Kalchas in the famous "oath by scepter" scene of refusal in Book I of *The Iliad*. As we know, Achilles' first oath is performed in response to the request Kalchas, the seer and sentry of dreams, who fears to say what he knows because of the likely violent reaction of King Agamemnon. In his dream-quest, the prophet Kalchas has seen that the reason why the god Apollo unleashed a plague upon the Achaeans was the latter's treatment of the Trojan women as a bounty of war, specially the daughter of Apollo's priest, their bodies turned into living currency. Achilles then vows to defend Kalchas against the King's wrath and all those who would prohibit his prophecy. His second oath entails a refusal of authority and, furthermore, the threat of using deadly force against the King.

Crucially, he swears by the scepter "which no longer bears leaves nor shoots", against a life spent and turned into an artifact of culture, a machine lending its once-living spirit to support human institutions. Now the dead tree has become a victim or an ancestor, a symbol for the promises and legal dispensations that in the eyes of Kalchas and his ally Achilles have become perverted, stripped of their spirit and legitimacy by the King's and his clique's abuse of the authority invested in him by the people.<sup>37</sup>

The hurling of the scepter by Achilles is symbolic partly in its performative gesture of refusal of the dead-perpetrating culture the scepter now indexes, and partly because it indicates our inability to conceal or absorb the terror present, not elsewhere, in u-topos ("terror as the other"), but in the most proximate immediacy. The scepter's hurling in the oath by scepter episode of *The*

*Iliad* operates as zig-zagging between “wanting to conceal and wanting to reveal”, reminding us that it’s “terror as usual”.<sup>38</sup>

At the bottom of this most crucial episode of myth and war lies the recognition that there could be only one form of universal communication: “the exchange of bodies through the secret language of corporeal signs”, in which the lure, arousal and the living object of the affect are one and the same. In this respect, Homer’s story isn’t that far from the body of texts invented by Baudelaire, Sade and Fourier. What sets the latter apart from the former is the same element that separates first and second technology, the essential function that money would play as an abstract equivalent in the kind of “universal whorehouse” they envisioned as the truth of modern capitalist society (which Baudelaire literally saw in one of his dreams).<sup>39</sup>

Arguably, however, that element was already present as the (constrained) potential of first technology subjugating nature -specifically, in this case, the bodies of women- and their absorption as tokens of invariant types. But what sets Fourier apart from Sade, and in a sense closer to Homer’s account of alliance in refusal, is the idea of a ritual gesture of denunciation and refusal which is also an anticipatory device, a uchronistic/utopian device based on the notion that a “direct exchange between individuals could take place at the level of the passions” or affects, and that this alliance/exchange could be realized through a principle of play -through a *dérive* of the “spectacles, ritual ceremonies and contests” similar to those that Benjamin’s translator and collaborator Pierre Klossowski found in the *theologia theatrica* of the ancients. In other words, whereas the Baudelaire-Sadean text indexes and archives the onset of modern commercialization of voluptuous affection, within the tradition that goes from

Homer to Fourier and the collaboration between Benjamin and Klossowski the archive reveals how “even in economics, perversion itself is the ground of value”. Or as Benjamin would put it, “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule”.<sup>40</sup>

We must indeed attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with such insight: that voluptuous affection always includes an element of aggression, which necessarily presupposes value, importance and appraisal. If this is the case, if a price has to be paid, after realizing that it’s “terror as usual” we must also accept that even if importance is everywhere it’s up to us to intensify it. To do so, to overcome the external perversion of finance-commercial economy (the hyper trophy of “needs”) an act of refusal must take place that indexes and forces the dissolution of the fictive unity of human individuals, forcing kings and the super-rich to overcome the bias of endowments. Perhaps this is what Benjamin meant when he said that “it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency”. In other words, such is the truth of popular revolutionary justice.

Thus, in the case of the Benjaminian reading of Genesis cosmology, Eve and Adam didn’t so much cause the law (the injunction to do daily work, produce and so on) to be imposed upon them and their successors because of their disobedience. Rather, they endured such constraints and invested in the God or gods thus instituted by ritually participating in a sort of interspecies kinship or alliance with them as well as the rest of creation. The Fall happens every time such a (cosmo)political economy, which fully recognizes the inter-temporal dimension of the relation between living agents and their dead ancestors or “spirits” (the latter being the real “owners” of the means of production), gives place to a different political economy: one that freezes time and operating under

the assumption that time has frozen, as if it were a still photograph, proceeds to establish the illusion of the unity of individuals (which is an external perversion, as Klossowski says) and separate them from their predecessors and other nonhumans by declaring the latter inert “things” (nature or environment). Thereafter, nature and things come to be only as a consequence of the labor force or symbolic form instilled into them by possessive individuals (internally united in the possession of their bodies, beginning with the bodies of women) with exclusive agency. In turn, Civilization and subjects (or civil-subjects and “civil society”) appear as distinct from nature and natural peoples under the sign of the sovereign One.

An inversion takes place here, which turns living historical labor (and living, thinking things) from its intensifying and multiplying operation (being in motion, like cinema) into dead or frozen labor externally imposed over an otherwise inert nature that thereafter exists solely for the satisfaction of an ever-expanding set of needs or “rights” (perversion). It’s the latter political economy (dead labor, external perversion) that is fetishistic, and not the former. For it’s the latter that posits human (civil) society as the center of an inert space-time universe (nature) onto which it projects its own will and symbolic forms with absolute force. In such a hostile universe there’re no allies, only enemies, “them”. upon whose dark skins “we” (a fictive unity) must supposedly write the greatness of our History.

In that sense at least, we’re all fetishists, regardless of whether we’re Durkheimian sociologists, Friedmanite quantitative economists, or structural-functionalist Marxists; and indeed, let me say in this respect (as have others) that

we need something like a Copernican Revolution in the social sciences, in law, literature and political philosophy.

Notice that, on the one hand, this doesn't mean we must abandon the critical position allowed by historical materialism or put Hegel right-side up again, as Marshall Sahlins says, for in the cosmopolitical orders of inter-temporal dimensions and inter-subjective relations with nonhumans, as well as in their antinomian ways and obsessive constraints, their combat and perpetual search for peace and political allies, "one may still speak of economic determinism – provided that the determinism is not economic".<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, such obsessive antinomian attitude and constraint, which I have provocatively termed "armed" struggle in the way to (rather than as the opposite of) peace, present as spirit, collective effervescence, combat, or phantasm in institutionalizing or constitutive rituals (exemplified by the oath by scepter episode in classical literature, and often imagined as an original "contract" authorized by a generic "will" that legitimates law in modern literature), is represented under the political economy of the industrial-colonial regime in a state of suspension or "emergency". In this respect, as suggested above, the "state of emergency" that according to Benjamin has become the rule isn't the consequence of violence. On the contrary, it's the attempt to suspend combat, to externally impose upon peoples a fictive unity (the unity of their 'needs') and to extract from peoples their ability to use force as well as do battle against the sovereign.

The state of emergency is thus a state of non-spirit and non-battle, it's "business as usual". Its example, in the stage set by second technology, is the unmanned vehicle of war, the drone driven from a remote location whose

vertical vision identifies one as a risky individual and turned at once judge, jury and executioner rains fire on us from afar in order to secure “business as usual” at home.

Word count: 9,948

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty” in *SW*, II, 2, 731-735 and 732, the latter also in “The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov”, in *SW*, III, 144.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”, in *SW*, III, 147 and “Karl Kraus”, in *SW*, II, 1, 433-458. There’s a reference in the paragraph to Caetano Veloso, “Anguish”, in *Tropicália and Beyond: Dialogues in Brazilian Film History*, edited by S. Solomon (Berlin: Archive Books, 2017) 35-46 at 35.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (Second version), in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by M. W. Jennings, B. Doherty & T. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008) 45-6 for my reading of the play with words and images aiming to establish a real state of suspension. See S. Dolbear, E. Leslie & S. Truskolaski, “Introduction: Walter Benjamin and the Magnetic Play of Words”, in Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller. Short Stories* (London & NYC: Verso, 2016) at xxvi. Also, Drucilla Cornell, “Derrida’s Negotiations as a Technique of Liberation”, in *Discourse, Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 39.2 (Spring 2017), co-edited by O. Guardiola-Rivera, 195-215.

<sup>4</sup> See Arjun Appadurai, *Banking on Words. The Failure of Language in the Age of Derivative Finance* (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) 86, 113-118, for quotes and paraphrases as well as the idea of a political future. Also, Margo Kitts, *Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society. Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in The Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 11-49; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 59 and *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) 22 ff.; Drucilla Cornell, *Moral Images of Freedom. A Future for Critical Theory* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) 75-104 and 137-149.

<sup>5</sup> Miguel Abensour, *Utopia. From Thomas More to Walter Benjamin* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 62-63. See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (London & New York: Verso, 1994, 64-66 on everyday life speech-acts referring back to psychosocial types: “‘I decree mobilization as President of the Republic’ ... and so on ... the philosophical shifter is a speech-act in the third person where it is always a conceptual persona who says ‘I’ ... hence Captain Ahab or Bartleby” for Melville or Penthesilea for Kleist.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 376, J85, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Banking on Words*, 74, for quotes and his reading of Weber with Durkheim and Marx; also 70-100.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, 491; for the English version, see *AP*, 473, N9,7, also 462, N2a,3 citing Blanqui by way of Geoffrey in 470, N7,3.

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Écrits français*, ed. Jean-Marie Monnoyer (Paris: Gallimard, 1991) 148-9 and 182, also cited by M. Abensour, *Utopia*, 88-91, quoting Bruno Tackels, *Histoire d'aura: Benjamin, Brecht, Adorno, Heidegger*, a thesis presented for the PhD in Philosophy, University of Strasbourg, 1994m 39-101.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 119 [D10a, 5].

<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 119, also 15, 21, and Miguel Abensour, *Utopia*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, Paris, 49-50, and *AP*. The reference is also to William James's praise of Charles Renouvier's "phenomenism" in note 18 of his essay *The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience*, and Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, "The Project of Renewing Childhood by Transforming One's Life", in *Theodor W. Adorno: an introduction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009) 1-10.

<sup>13</sup> Aby Warburg spoke of "interval iconology", and Jacques Derrida talked about spectrality (the structure of the archive, what it cannot unveil, the open future) in this sense. See Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 462, and Georges Didi-Huberman, *A imagen sobrevivente: historia da arte e tempo dos fantasmas segundo Aby Warburg* (Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 2013) 424-426, citing Arendt on Benjamin; Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) 69-70, 84; and Phillips-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg e a imagem em movimento* (Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 2013) 240, all cited by Carlos Adriano, "Found Footage and the Magnetization of Affection", in *Tropicália and Beyond: Dialogues in Brazilian Film History*, 170-5.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Théorie fragmentaire de la radio: Théâtre et radio. Sur le contrôle mutuel de leur travail éducatif", in *Écrits Radiophoniques*, 175-8, at 177; and Jean Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014) 56-7, for my use of speaking ghosts, filmed subjects and the notion of photo-electric analysis.

<sup>15</sup> Enrique Dussel, "Walter Benjamin y la Política de la Liberación", keynote at Universidad de Murcia, Spain, 27 February 2012, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuGyjGosmR4>.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 380, J88 and J88a, 1, quoting Félix Piyat's preface for the 1884 edition of *Le Chiffonier de Paris*.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by R. Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2008) 145-7, 27, I, 66. Also, *ND*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *ND*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical perspective", in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012) 28, referencing Adorno.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Benjamin, *SW*, I, 242, and 250. See also James Martel, "Walter Benjamin", in *Histories of Violence. Post-War Critical Thought*, edited by B. Evans & T. Carver (London: Zed Books, 2017) 14-30.

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Rankine, *Don't let Me Be Lonely. An American Lyric* (London: Penguin Poetry, 2017) 130-1. "The handshake is our decided ritual of both asserting (I am here) and handing over (here) a self to another ... Or one meaning of here is 'In this world, in this life, on earth. In this place or position, indicating the presence of', or in other words, I am here. It also means to hand something to somebody—Here you are. Here, he said to her. Here both recognizes and demands recognition. I see you, or here, he said to her. In order for something to be handed over a hand must extend and a hand must receive".

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 383, J89a, 4, calling for a comparison "on the subject of the ragpicker", with Marx in the section "Die moderne Manufaktur" in *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, 438.



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- <sup>23</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ, “Utopia and Propheticism from Latin America. A Concrete Essay in Historical Soteriology”, in *A Grammar of Justice. The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014) 7-56, citing K. Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, at 39 ff.
- <sup>24</sup> Miguel Benasayag, *Che Guevara. La Gratuidad del Riesgo* (Buenos Aires: Quadrata/Cono Sue, 2012) 81-5, for all quotations and paraphrases in this paragraph. Benasayag is referring to Che Guevara’s conception of risk in action as a Benjaminian “constellation”. See also, John Berger, *Portraits* (London: Verso, 2015) 123.
- <sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1989) 407-8. See *AP*, 361 for the English version.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid. Also, Walter Benjamin, “Eduardo Fuchs, coleccionista e historiador”, in *Obras II*, 2 (Madrid: Abada, 2009) 106. See *SW*: 2, for the English version, and Corrado Bologna, *El teatro de la mente. De Giulio Camillo a Aby Warburg* (Barcelona: Siruela, 2017) 230-277.
- <sup>27</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Eduardo Fuchs, coleccionista e historiador”, in *Obras II*, 2, 106. See *SW*: 2, for the English version.
- <sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 17 and 940.
- <sup>29</sup> Walter Benjamin, *SW*, III, 34, 50-67 at 57.
- <sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, *AP*, 17. See section 2 above.
- <sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Paris Diary”, 18 January section, in *SW*: 2, 342.
- <sup>32</sup> Walter Benjamin, *SW*, I, 72.
- <sup>33</sup> Marshall Sahlins, “The Original Political Society”, in *On Kings*, ed. by D. Graeber & M. Sahlins (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017) 23-64, at 38 and 54, citing Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Deborah Danowski and Phillipe Descola, among others.
- <sup>34</sup> David Graeber, in *On Kings*, 81-82.
- <sup>35</sup> David Graeber, in *On Kings*, 76.
- <sup>36</sup> Graeber says that “in this, at least, the Girardians are right” (ibid.). In everything else, I fear, they’re wrong.
- <sup>37</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, I:73-83 and I:233-244, also cited by Margo Kitts, *Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society*, 102-108.
- <sup>38</sup> Michael Taussig, “Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of History as State of Siege”, in *Violence in War and Peace. An Anthology*, edited by Nancy Scheper-Hughes & Philippe Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 269-271 at 270.
- <sup>39</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Living Currency*, 69 and 90.
- <sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations*, edited by H. Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968-9) 253-64. Also Pierre Klossowski, *Living Currency*, 53-4, 65-68, for other quotes and paraphrasing in the paragraph.
- <sup>41</sup> Marshall Sahlins, in *On Kings*, 57.